

CHARACTER		perfectionists were there
SETTING		Just make it on
IMAGERY		follow the sun with 1 out

We went down the path and entered the valley.

It was the last thing I would have expected. Trees. Shade. Cool.

You couldn't hear the crickets any more, only the twittering of birds. There were purple cyclamen. And carpets of green ivy. And a pleasant smell. It made you feel like finding yourself a cosy little spot by a tree trunk and having a nap.

Salvatore appeared suddenly, like a ghost. 'What do you think of this place then? Isn't it great?'

'Fantastic!' I replied, looking around. Maybe there was a stream to drink from.

'What took you so long? I thought you'd gone back down.'

'No, my sister's foot was hurting, so...I'm thirsty. I need a drink.'

Salvatore took a bottle out of his rucksack. 'There's not much left.'

Maria and I went halves. It was barely enough to wet our lips. *he looks after her before worrying about himself*

'Who won the race?' I was worried about the forfeit. I was worn out. I hoped Skull, for once, might let me off or postpone it to another day.

'Skull.'

'Where did you come?'

'Second. Remo was third.'

'What about Barbara?'

'Last.'

'Who's got to do the forfeit?'

'Skull says Barbara's got to do it. But Barbara says you've got to do it because you came last.'

'So?'

'I don't know, I went off for a walk. I'm fed up with all these forfeits.'

We started walking towards the farmhouse.

It was a really tumbledown place. It stood in the middle of a clearing covered by the branches of the oaks. Deep cracks ran up from the foundations to the roof. All that was left of the windowpanes was a few shards. A fig tree, all tangled, had overgrown the stairway that led up to the balcony. The roots had dismantled the stone steps and brought down the parapet. At the top there was still an old light-blue door, rotten to the core and peeled by the sun. In the middle of the building a big arch opened on to a room with a vaulted ceiling. A cowshed. Rusty props and

This seems to be nice for what goes on in this place.

This house represents the failing state of Southern Italy

the narrator is grown up so he is remembering events. → is his memory accurate?

Even after twenty-two years I still don't understand how she put up with us. It must have been the fear of being left on her own.

'All right. Let's vote on it,' Skull conceded. 'I say it's you.'

'So do I,' I said.

'So do I,' parroted Maria.

We looked at Salvatore. No one could abstain when there was a vote. That was the rule.

'So do I,' said Salvatore, almost in a whisper.

'See? Five one. You've lost. You do it,' Skull concluded.

Barbara tightened her lips and her fists, I saw her swallow a lump the size of a tennis ball. She dropped her head, but she didn't cry.

I respected her.

- what does this say about Michele?

'What...do I have to do?' she stammered.

Skull rubbed his throat. His sadistic mind got to work.

He wavered for a moment. 'You've got to...show it to us...You've got to show it to all of us.'

Barbara swayed. 'What have I got to show to you?'

'Last time you showed us your tits.' And turning to us, 'This time you're going to show us your slit. Your hairy slit. You pull down your knickers and you show it to us.' He burst into raucous laughter, expecting that we would do the same, but we didn't. We froze, as if a wind from the North Pole had suddenly blown into the valley.

The forfeit was too harsh. None of us wanted to see Barbara's slit. It was a punishment for us as well. My stomach tightened. I wished I was far away. There was something dirty, something...I don't know. Something nasty, that's all. And I didn't like my sister being there.

- protection

'Forget it,' said Barbara shaking her head. 'I don't

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'What?' Remo asked me.

'The forfeit.'

'No. She's got to,' Skull snapped at me. 'It's nothing to do with you. Shut up.'

'Yes it is. I came last. I've got to do it.'

'No. I decide.' Skull came towards me.

My legs were shaking, but I hoped nobody would notice. 'Let's have another vote.'

Salvatore got between me and Skull. 'Second votes are allowed.'

We had certain rules and one of them was that second votes were allowed.

I raised my hand. 'I do the forfeit.'

Salvatore put up his hand. 'Michele does it.'

Barbara fastened her belt and sobbed. 'He does it. It's only fair.'

Skull was caught by surprise, he stared at Remo with his mad eyes. 'What do you say?'

Remo sighed. 'Barbara does it.'

'What shall I do?' asked Maria.

I nodded to her.

'My brother does it.'

'Four two,' Salvatore said. 'Michele's won. He does it.'

- she looks to him for guidance and he confirms his sacrifice.

Getting up to the first floor of the house wasn't easy.

The stairway no longer existed. The steps had been reduced to a heap of stone blocks. I was working my way up by holding onto the branches of the fig tree. The brambles scratched my arms and legs. One thorn had grazed my right cheek.